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ABSTRACT

Two methods were used to identify important operational constraints and their potential impact on special education camps: a review of current literature and programs using content analysis and the development of day and resident camping experiences. In the content analysis, a process of evolution through trial and error was seen as leading to better camping programs for special audiences. Nine operational constraints were isolated as being important. Outcomes of these were identified as self-development, skill acquisition and development, social skill development, and motivational stimulation. Case studies, based on day and resident experiences for mentally retarded audiences, were undertaken to test the constraints in relation to outcomes identified. Stimulation of the senses through tangible qualities of the environment, a low ratio between teaching and counseling staff and participants, and a program before and after the camping experience were indicated as the most important operational constraints in the development of a quality curriculum. The three main concerns in program development were identified as a multi-dimensional tool for assessment, an efficient method of implementation, and an effective instrument for evaluation. A cooperative communication network was described as a major factor in controlling any one of the three. (JD)

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Some Important Considerations in the Development of a Camping Program for Special Education Audiences[1]

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ABSTRACT

The educational component of camping is being scrutinized to determine its contribution to institutional settings. Day and resident camping are being utilized as a supplement to classroom and community resources. One of the least explored areas is the contribution of camping to special educational programs. Case studies were undertaken to identify important operational constraints in programming for special audiences. Results from these studies indicate that operational factors are a critical dimension to increasing the quality of the experience and providing greater continuity between the camping and non-camping settings.

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INTRODUCTION

As the formal and informal educational programs are beginning to scrutinize their curricula and budgets because of economic pressures, the role of camping and its contribution as an educational experience is becoming clearer and more important. Day and resident camping represents an extended block of time where it is possible to concentrate effort on a selected number of objectives. In addition to a time commitment, day and resident camps are usually associated with a specialized environment. Because of time and location commitments, control over educational experiences may be better than in normal instructional situations. Learners can be emersed in a new environment and educational experiences are total, especially in a resident camp. In the resident setting, it is possible to have a greater influence over experiences so this type of camping has been more successful in achieving its objectives. If a program is designed so that there are both day and resident camping experiences in the curriculum and they are designed to compliment each other, this will add to program continuity. This type of framework allows experiences to be designed based upon a time and location commitment. With a synthesis of these programs, the flexibility of allocating curriculum resources to achieve objectives of a program increases dramatically (Bain and Grosso, 1975; Kujawa, 1975a and 1975b).

Day and resident camping are utilized in the curriculum as a supplement to classroom and community resources. The criteria for utilization of day and resident camping in a curriculum is to extend the facilities and educational resources beyond the classroom and community (Abbas and Donoghue, 1975; Kujawa, 1975a and 1975b). Where there are no resources available, these two types of camping offer a viable alternative to increasing the educational resources available with a minimum time and money commitment.

One of the least investigated camp settings, especially the resident type, is special education programs (Hensley, 1978; Rawson, 1978). Special education programs have not been emphasized in most programs because of competition for facilities by normal individuals and the lack of design to handle these special audiences. Another problem has been that there must be a larger capital outlay for programming because of such factors as a need for more specialized staff, supervision, and smaller group capacity. The therapeutic ramifications of such programming on special audiences is just beginning to be explored (Shniderman, 1974; Salslow, 1978). A camp environment is an excellent setting for therapeutic programs because the environment can be simplified. Another element that makes this setting conducive is that it can bring these audiences into contact with the physical environment, an element often missing in special population programs. One of the problems with special education programming for camps has been isolating important operational constraints to determine their impact upon the curriculum (Bain and Grosso, 1975; Evans, 1975; Rawson, 1978; Schwartz, 1975; Shniderman, 1974).

METHODS

Two different methods were used to obtain information about constraints and their potential impact upon outcomes for special population camps: (1) a review of current literature and programs using content analysis (Hensley, 1979) and (2) the development of two camp curricula, a day and resident experience, utilizing the principles isolated to obtain an indication about the importance of each in relation to outcomes. The content analysis phase of the study was based upon a number count relating to constraints and outcomes. Camp curricula were then developed utilizing the program principles isolated and evaluated using a subjective measure of professionals' opinion as to the importance of each constraint in relation to outcomes.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Results of the content analysis indicate that the better camping programs for special audiences are a process of evolution through trial and error. Each audience will respond to different elements or activities but the basic parameters for a good program are the common threads that must guide curriculum development. The following were the important operational constraints isolated (only constraints that had a frequency larger than 10% were reported): (1) stimulation of the senses through tangible qualities of the environment, (2) repetitiveness in the program, (3) a low ratio between instructional and counseling staff and participants, (4) working in small groups and with the same counselor and instructional staff throughout the learning experience, (5) development of an identity with the group in terms of such items as camp t-shirts and group songs, (6) interspersion of quiet and hard physical recreational activities, (7) a regimented and disciplined program, (8) a short time span such as a weekend or two to three day camping experience, and (9) a program before and after the camping experience (Abbas and Donoghue, 1973; Abernethy, 1974; Hayward et. al., 1974; Jackson and Angelino, 1974; McClung, 1974; Schwartz, 1975; Shniderman, 1974; Shotter, 1973; Young et. al., 1951). The outcomes identified can be classified into the following categories (only outcomes that had a frequency larger than 10% were reported): self-development, skill acquisition and development, social skill development, and motivational stimulation.

CASE STUDIES

Case studies were undertaken to test the constraints isolated in relation to outcomes identified. The studies were based upon day and resident experiences for a mentally retarded audience. The day camp program was held in cooperation with individuals from the Tiffin Developmental Center (Ohio), and the resident experience was held in cooperation with individuals from Buchanan County Extension Service (Virginia). Camp staff was cooperative and devoted much attention to individual and group activities such as swimming, vespers, campfire, sports, and recreation sessions. A leader ratio of one adult to three campers was an important factor in directing activities and providing additional companionship.

Of the nine items evaluated, professionals indicated that (1) stimulation of the senses through tangible qualities of the environment, (2) a low ratio between instructional and counseling staff and participants, and

(3) a program before and after the camping experience were the most important operational constraints in development of a quality curriculum. The reasons given for the effectiveness of these factors were: (1) an outdoor environment tends to challenge and stimulate, (2) a low ratio focuses more attention upon the client which makes him feel more important and there is more time for skill development, and (3) pre and post programming build continuity which helps the clients better interpret their experiences. The outcome most frequently listed with these operational factors was self-development. The reason given most often to explain the priority of this outcome was that an outdoor environment helps develop independence of action.

DIRECTIONS

Camping as an activity for special populations has many positive aspects, but the primary question is "what is the uniqueness of this particular leisure setting and the outcomes from the experience?" The uniqueness of the location for special populations, especially those that are institutionalized, is that it represents a diversity of experiences in a location that presents a challenge to learning and living (Hensley, 1979; McDonald, 1974). The diversity of the environment provides for new experiences that are different and, therefore, add new opportunities to reinforce skills already learned. The one outcome that can best be achieved in the camp setting is confidence in being able to perform skills in a different environment, especially one that challenges (Sessoms, 1979). So often programs are set through structure and routine that an open environment offers an opportunity to create and develop which adds confidence because the activity is self-initiated. Another outcome, that is, non-client oriented is the benefits to the staff (personnel). The outcomes that are most important to this audience are those associated with solidarity. Solidarity is an element that brings the staff closer together. This allows them to better function as a unit to see the part to whole relationships in their job tasks or endeavors.

Operational constraints are an important factor in improving program quality. These constraints must be coordinated with programming principles in order not to lose the full impact of the improvement in program quality. A primary factor in the effective use of constraints is continuity which is achieved by organization to improve environmental conditions that help in completing program objectives.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Camping has expanded to all facets of society, especially special populations. This has been accomplished through comprehensive planning. There exists a distinct difference in quality among camps. The separation of success and failure within the individual system is perpetrated by the lack of professional planning. There are three concerns in program planning: assessment, implementation, and evaluation.

In order to stress the importance of these principles, abstracts of established camping programs will be utilized. The initial phase of assessment can be illustrated through the camping program offered by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (Folkerth, 1978). The rehabilitation unit established a comprehensive day camp program for autistic

children fourteen years ago. The program is offered only at selected times of the year for one week. Due to its popularity the camp locations are throughout the county to keep control of camp size and make it readily available to citizens. The only restriction is a medical diagnosis of autism or signs of autistic tendencies, such as self-stimulation, echolalia, or aloofness. A client must be between the ages of five and twenty-one and able to administer all prescribed medication. It is essential that all programs have predetermined policies and guidelines in order to control program design and direction. The camp sites are limited to 12 children. The staff consists of a site director, one or two additional staff persons and student volunteers from the community. The ratio is one to three between staff and participants. This allows for individual attention for specific skill development within a small group structure. The basic principles of behavior modification are used, that is, time-out, positive and negative reinforcements, extinction, tokens, imitation, and stimulus control. Employment of behavior modification requires qualified personnel for this technique to be effective. Assessment of campers and the program have become essential in the prescriptive program design. Few standardized tools are available for comprehensive assessment. A camp, whether day or resident, must be designed to provide evaluative information on the intensive, continuous interactions of campers. An instrument that assesses a single dimension does not provide an adequate basis for the diagnosis. A multi-dimensional tool is essential because effective design is based upon the programmer's ability to understand the complexity of the audience and the environment and to prescriptively create a vehicle that will help the individual to grow and learn with minimum effort. The assessment component of camping is vital for without a thorough understanding of the nature and needs of the individual the foundation of the program becomes unsteady.

The second phase of camp programming involves implementation. There exists a positive correlation between a program's success and the manner in which it is carried out, especially its structure. A good example of a varied structure can be illustrated with a winter camping program started in 1973 (Folkerth, 1978). Camp Freezurtoz is located in Nampa, Idaho, operated by the Recreation Department of the Idaho State School. The two major objectives of the camp are: (1) enjoyment of the setting and (2) independence of action. A typical day includes cabin clean up, restocking wood for the fire, lunch, tubing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, a short rest with some hot chocolate, and a brief nature hike before dinner. After dinner each camper is required to make his own bed. Alternatives are the basis of the evening program; some are tubing, storytelling, singing, or sleeping. The true backbone of a camp is its program operations. Well-planned structured days can help control unforeseen problems. The campers can continue on without interruption and the program staff can provide sound activity with confidence. This is vital to the director's ability to accomplish his goals.

The final phase of programming is evaluation and modification. Without a mechanism to grade the existing program, modification would be impractical. A feedback system was established at a week-long camp held annually for institutionalized mentally retarded at Tiffin Developmental Center. Hertzer is a privately owned camp donated one week per summer to the center. The program staff had to contend with a variety of problems like transporting 200 people

daily to programs. The center is located five miles from the camp. The camp was considered successful due to the communication network created between staff and support services. Prior to the camp, and shortly after it ended, a questionnaire was sent to all personnel. The major function of the instrument was to identify problem areas and modify the program to handle crises. Major transportation schedules were necessary not only to handle personnel but foodstuffs to accommodate the campers and staff. With the pre-questionnaire many overlooked items were identified and corrected. With the post-questionnaire the problems not identified can be corrected before the next summer's camp. Personnel input is important to the operational success of a camp through the establishment of a good communications network.

Many variables control the direction and outcome of a program. It is essential to have methods to identify the unseen problems before they dominate and control the situation. A major factor controlling any one of the three basic levels of assessment, implementation, and evaluation is communication. Programs are usually a team effort and only through cooperation can effective communication links be developed.

CONCLUSION

Much empirical research is needed to study the group dynamics of special education programs in day and resident camp settings for both normal and special audiences. This type of data would have positive implications for the development of a more meaningful program for special audiences and foster greater understanding of normal audiences and those involved in development of special education programs. Still another important outcome is the position of recreation in curriculum development. Recreation can be used as a stimulator or a precursor and a vehicle to foster therapeutic learning (Keay, 1973; Passantino, 1975).

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